My Happy Family

Cherry Kearton

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MY HAPPY FAMILY

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By CHERRY KEARTON

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" My happy family."

Frontispiece]

MY HAPPY FAMILY

The Adventures of Mary the Chimpanzee and The Story of her Friendship with a Fox-Terrier and a Mongoose Told by

CHERRY KEARTON

Author of
"My Friend Toto," "My Dog Simba,"
etc., etc.

WITH 23 PHOTOGRAPHS BY THE AUTHOR

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MY HAPPY FAMILY

CHAPTER ONE

PETER IS INTRODUCED

I KNEW very well that when Peter Turner came to spend part of his summer holidays with me in the country he would find plenty with which to amuse himself.

My house and grounds are both full of the things which every boy loves. In the house are guns, cameras, Zulu spears, photographs of wild animals without number, books, curiosities, and—not the least amusing thing, as many people have assured me,—myself, with a pretty large repertoire of exciting stories collected in my travels round the world. In the grounds are waterfalls, a trout tank, a goldfish tank, a lawn with clock-golf, and two lakes, one of which measures some two

hundred yards by eighty yards and is furnished with a half-built island and a skiff.

What more could anybody want?

Boys, however, are the most suspicious of Nature's creatures. When a boy learns that he is asked to spend his holidays, or part of them, with a grown-up "pretence" uncle, he says: "Well, I wouldn't mind if there were going to be some of the fellows there. Uncle Cherry 's all right, of course, but he 's a bit *old*, isn't he?"

That being so, and being convinced that—in spite of my alleged antiquity—I could give young Peter the time of his life if only I could entice him into my garden, I laid a trap for the young rascal. I wrote and asked him to come, assuring him that he could have all sorts of fun playing with three young friends of mine, Tommy, Robin and Mary, who, I said, were quite as full of mischief as he was himself and always ready for any kind of sport.

Consequently, Peter's suspicions were allayed, and he came.

"In the grounds is a lake."

PETER IS INTRODUCED

He is a sturdy boy of eleven, very full of energy and very sure of himself. He insisted, quite unnecessarily, on helping the gardener to carry his box into the house, and then we went on the verandah for Peter to get his first view of the garden.

We looked down on the flower-beds and the lawn. Running about on the grass was a little fox-terrier pup, white with a black patch over his right eye.

" That 's a jolly little beast," said Peter. " What do you call him ? "

" The puppy ? " I answered carelessly. " Oh, that 's Tommy."

" Ripping little beast," said Peter again. The coincidence of the names hadn't struck him.

" Come downstairs," I suggested. " I want to show you something."

We crossed the lawn, Peter stopping to give Tommy a pat and getting a friendly lick from the puppy's pink tongue in return. I led the way

along a path behind my cinema studio. On the farther border of the garden I stopped and pointed to something lying on the ground : a long-furred animal, looking rather like a ferret.

" Golly ! " said Peter. " What 's that ? "

" A mongoose," I explained. " A great friend of Tommy's. Presently you 'll see them playing together."

" Never seen a thing like that before," said Peter. " Is it tamè ? "

" Perfectly," I said. " Robin wouldn't hurt anyone."

Peter looked up sharply. " Robin ? " he repeated.

" Yes," I said. " This is Robin. Nice coat he 's got, hasn't he ? Robin, stand up and show yourself ! "

Very obediently, the mongoose stood up—or rather, it sat up on its hind legs and outstretched tail, with its two front paws hanging in front of it as if it were begging.

But Peter ignored the demonstration. " I say," he said, " you 're not pulling my leg, are you ? You said I could go ragging with those fellows, Tom and Robin, and a girl. Where are they ? "

Peter's suspicions were growing rapidly. But I took a leaf out of his own book and ignored questions that didn't appeal to me.

" Come along and see Mary," I said. " You 'll have a lot of games with her."

Peter, however, wasn't to be put off. " Look here," he said, " do you mean to say that Tom's only a dog and Robin 's this thing here ? " And he pointed to the mongoose with his foot : a gesture of disrespect which Robin rightly resented.

" You 'll have plenty of fun with them," I said.

Peter pouted. " Jolly sort of sell," he muttered, and he wanted, I am certain, to say that he wouldn't have come if he had known ; but indignation hadn't yet completely got the better of his manners.

"You 'll probably spend most of your time playing with Mary," I suggested soothingly.

"Oh, a girl," said Peter with the superiority of his sex and age.

"Still," I said, "you 'd better come and see her."

He followed me, very unwillingly. For two pins he would have gone and got out his box and carted it back to the station : but then there might have been rather a difficulty with his father, who was an old friend of mine. Poor boy ! He was tricked, trapped and a prisoner, and, knowing it, he suffered as—well, as an eagle in the Zoo must suffer. Or at any rate, he thought he did.

He had my sympathy. But since it was certain that in a few hours he would be perfectly happy again, I kept a stern face and called to him to follow me. He came : but with a dragging step and a hangdog look, which certainly didn't suggest that we were at the beginning of a very enjoyable holiday.

He lagged behind, contriving to keep at such

a distance that I could just hear what he said, although he was far enough away to be able to pretend that he hadn't said it. " Of all the rotten sells," he muttered. " A dog and that overgrown insect and a girl ! It is a jolly shame ! "

Knowing something of boys and their ways, I ignored his remarks, and led the way round to the door of the studio.

" Come inside ! " I said. " Here 's Mary ! "

She was, as a matter of fact, sitting on a table at the far end of the studio. With one hand she was dabbing white powder all over her nose and upper lip, while she watched the effect in a small, round mirror held in her other hand. She seemed entirely lost in her occupation. As may be seen from her portrait, she has a kind face, although her chief claim to beauty, perhaps, lies in her thick black hair. She brushes this hair very diligently every morning, and seems to find the task rather wearisome : but then that is the disadvantage of wearing hair all over one's body.

As soon as she heard my footsteps, she set down the mirror and the powder-puff, swung herself down to the ground, waddled across the floor, and climbed into my arms. Though only three years old, she is as affectionate as chimpanzees always are.

I turned to the miserable boy beside me.

"This," I said, "is Mary."

Peter didn't answer. His indignation was too great for words to express it.

CHAPTER TWO

MARY COMES TO TEA

I AM sorry to say that Peter spent the next two hours in what I can only call a fit of the sulks. He went off into the garden alone, and chewed his grievance that I should have played such a shabby trick on him.

However, by four o'clock a battle was fought between Indignation and Appetite, and (as is inevitably the case where a small boy is concerned) Appetite was victorious. Consequently, when the tea-bell rang, Peter appeared in the sitting-room, ready enough to eat, but still conscious of his dignity and therefore determined to exchange no sallies of conversation with the host that had asked him to play with a "monkey."

In silence he took his place at the table, and I

noticed hope dawning in his eyes as he saw that the table was laid for three: if someone was coming to tea there was just a chance that it would be some fellow who wouldn't be too beastly old and might be of some use.

But a minute later his face fell, and I could see that it was only the presence of a dish of cream cakes on the table that restrained him from rising in his wrath and returning alone to brood on his wrongs in the rèmoter parts of the garden. For no sooner were Peter and I seated for our tea, than the door was opened, and in walked Mary. Dressed in her afternoon jersey, she walked upright across the floor and swung herself on to the empty chair that stood between Peter and me. She took no notice of Peter, for all her attention was concentrated—as Peter's had been a minute before—on the food. In her excitement she gave two sharp, quick grunts. Then she reached out a hand to the dish, helped herself to a slice of bread and jam, and proceeded with her meal.

That was altogether too much for Peter. It even drove him to protest.

" I say," he said, " you don't mean to say that this—this creature *eats?* "

" Well, Peter," I answered, " you don't expect me to starve her, do you ? "

Peter shifted his chair several inches to the left, to be further from the chimpanzee that was eating beside him with such evident enjoyment.

" But look here," he said, " it 's eating our food. I call it beastly. Can't it be tied up outside ? "

I assured Peter that Mary was a member of the family, quite as much entitled to her tea as was anyone else. " She 's perfectly clean and very well behaved," I added. " Just enjoy your own tea, and let Mary enjoy hers."

Mary ate two pieces of bread and jam, and then took her cup in her hand and held it out for me to fill it. I gave her some milk and she drank it at a draught, tilting the cup right on to her

nose. Then she wanted more. I gave her another cupful, and it went as quickly as the first. That should have been enough for her, but she was particularly thirsty that day, and when I wouldn't fill the cup a third time she began to cry like a spoilt child.

When Mary cries, which is not very often, anyone who did not know her might be alarmed, and I was not surprised at Peter's look of horror. Not only did Mary howl at the top of her voice, but she beat herself on the head and face with her hand. In her excitement she got as near to speech as a chimpanzee possibly can, and I knew that she was trying to say, "I want some more milk, I want it, I want it."

I never like to hear Mary cry, and accordingly I behaved in the way in which men always behave when they are left alone with children: I let her have everything she wanted.

Consequently, we became a happy party once more: all of us, that is, except Peter, who was

more disgusted than ever. But his turn was coming.

With her thirst at last quenched, Mary settled down once more to her meal.

" You can have a rock-cake," I said to her; and then, but not till then, she stretched out her long arm and helped herself to a cake from the dish in front of her.

" That looks a very nice cake, Mary," I said. " Will you give me a piece ? " Immediately Mary held up what was left of her cake towards my lips, and I pretended to bite it. " Thank you," I said. " Give Peter a piece."

Now Mary could only have heard me call the boy " Peter " three or four times, but she is very quick at learning new words, and already she had learnt the meaning of that name. She turned to Peter at once and held up her cake to him.

Indignantly, he brushed it away.

" Never mind, Mary," I said. " Finish the cake yourself and then we 'll smoke our cigarettes."

I 'm afraid Peter was hardly enjoying his meal. Even the éclairs appeared to have lost their flavour.

" Now, Mary," I said, " Peter will excuse you if you go and get your cigarette tube."

The little chimpanzee got down at once from her chair, walked across the room to my writing-desk, opened a drawer, and took out the tube that I kept specially for her use. Then she climbed back to her seat, and I took out my case and held it while she picked out a cigarette, fitted it carefully into the tube, and placed the other end of the tube between her lips.

Out of the corner of my eye I looked at Peter. He was pretending to be absorbed in his tea, but I could see that he was watching Mary all the while in astonishment.

" You 'll want a match, Mary," I said, and she put a hand into the side-pocket of my coat, drew out the match-box, opened it after some fruitless efforts, and then proceeded to strike a match. First, she put it beside the tube in her mouth while

Daily Mirror Photograph.

"Marv sat smoking her cigarette."

with both hands she got the box into a suitable position. Then she took the match in her fingers, but had some difficulty in lighting it; and when at last she did get a light she was holding it so close to the end that she burnt herself. She dropped it quickly, but she was quite undeterred, and she tried again and again until at last she succeeded, not only in striking a match, but in lighting her cigarette from it, drawing in her breath and blowing out clouds of smoke through her nostrils.

I heard Peter say "By Jove!" in a note distinctly of admiration; but when I looked up his face was buried in his cup, and I felt that he wanted, poor boy, to pretend that he hadn't said it. Still, it was the beginning of the reconciliation.

Mary sat smoking her cigarette with obvious enjoyment till it was half-way through; then she threw it away, and I was only just in time to prevent a hole being burnt in the carpet.

"Go outside to the verandah, now, Mary,"

I said, and when she had gone I went to a drawer of my desk and brought out a life-size toy kitten, made of rubber and filled with air, which I had bought while on one of my lecture tours a few weeks before. This toy always gives Mary much food for thought. She cannot understand it. She seems to recognise that it is an animal, and she is just a little afraid of it. Probably it is the kitten's sphinx-like smile that disturbs her, but in any case she has never yet summoned up enough courage to touch it with her hands.

Now, I put it down on the floor, just inside the verandah door, called to Mary to come in, and waited to see what she would do. She came ambling along, quite unconcerned, until suddenly she saw the rubber kitten right in her path, and then she stopped. Going on all fours, she made a little, short, quick jump that only brought her a few inches nearer, and as she did so she shouted at it : " Grunt, grunt." Then she jumped again and shouted again : " Grunt, grunt." The kitten,

of course, continued to smile like Mona Lisa, and Mary stood staring at it, afraid to come closer.

I wanted to see whether any inducement would prevail on Mary and make her forget her fears of the harmless toy, and consequently I screwed my knuckles into my eyes and pretended to cry—a second-rate performance, I fear, which gave Peter considerable surprise. But I knew that when I did that Mary would always come running as fast as she could to comfort me. Now she became very excited. She tried to get in at the doorway, first on one side of the kitten and then on the other, but her heart failed her each time. Then she found a way. She grasped the lintel of the doorway with both hands and both feet, and began to climb up it. When she was four feet from the ground she let go, gave a great leap forward, sprang right over the kitten's head and landed on the carpet, well within the room.

Peter clapped his hands and cried " Bravo " ;

but I thought it tactful not to notice his enthusiasm : and in any case I was busy rewarding Mary for her cleverness and persuading her that my own distress was not really as great as I had made it appear.

" We 'll have another game with that kitten," I said at last. " Put it down in the middle of the floor, Peter, and then get my walking-stick. Lean the stick against the wall."

I let go of Mary, and directly she saw the kitten she wanted another encounter with it. She had not seen Peter move it, and since she imagined it to be alive, she must, I suppose, have imagined that it had walked from one spot to the other. There are not very many things that make Mary afraid, yet this toy certainly terrifies her ; but I must say that she is courageous at heart, for whatever happens she will always come again to the fight, as eager as ever.

Now, when she saw the kitten standing " at bay," she determined to have a real fight with it.

She jumped and shouted, but could not scare it, and then she looked round, as I had expected her to do, for a weapon. She soon saw the walking-stick and took hold of it, while Peter completely forgot his own troubles in his excitement. He danced around Mary and the kitten, shouting encouragement.

"Go on, Mary!" he cried. "Give it to her."

And then, when Mary began hitting out, wildly and with very uncertain aim, Peter insisted on giving her instructions on how to fight.

But it wasn't much of a scrap: the odds were too uneven. Mary's second stroke only dented the leg of my piano. But her third was a good one and true. With the handle of the stick, she very literally fulfilled Peter's instructions to "slosh it in the jaw," and the career of the unfortunate kitten came to an abrupt and inglorious end: its jaw was not merely "sloshed," but pierced, and as the air came out and the kitten grew

smaller and smaller Mary was so scared at what she had accomplished that she ran to me to be comforted.

I, as I have hinted, am a model of tact, and I refrained from noticing Peter's excitement. The good work of making him appreciate Mary was being accomplished, and that was all that mattered to me.

I let Mary run into the garden, and then I turned to Peter.

"Now," I said, "what are you going to do? You 've three hours before dinner."

"Oh, I 'm going on that jolly lake," said Peter, and I felt encouraged by the new cheerfulness in his tone.

"Can you manage the boat?" I asked.

"Rather!" said Peter.

"Well, be careful," I said. "It 's a weedy lake and the skiff is difficult to handle. If you find it too difficult, I could come with you."

"No jolly fear," said Peter. "Unless," he

added, with a sudden politeness, " I 'll be keeping you out of it."

" Well," I said, " I 'll tell you what we 'll do. We 'll have a race, and the first one to get to the boat shall have it."

" Right you are," said Peter, and off we went across the lawn and round the studio.

It was, I think, practically a dead-heat between Peter and myself: I have been something of a runner in my time, but Peter made up ground at the corners, I being too heavily built for swift turns. But when we reached the edge of the lake, we couldn't find the boat.

" Where is it ? " cried Peter.

" Ah, ha ! " I panted. " You 've lost, Peter."

" I haven't," he said. " I was half a yard ahead."

" Yes," I said, " you may have beaten me, but Mary has beaten us both ! Come and look here ! "

I led him round to the other side of the

boat-house. From there we could see the skiff, a couple of yards from the shore, with Tommy the terrier standing in the bows, yapping excitedly, while Mary the chimpanzee sat on a thwart, holding a scull as if it were something between a punt-pole and a paddle.

" Well, I 'm jolly well hanged ! " said Peter.

CHAPTER THREE

MARY GOES A-SAILING

PETER did get on to the lake in the skiff that afternoon, after all. His admiration of Mary was genuine enough, and I felt that his return to good temper should be properly rewarded.

The difficulty was, however, to get the skiff back to the shore. In the ordinary course of events, as I explained to Peter, it was kept chained to a stake, just in front of the boat-house. Mary had learnt to unwind the chain. Once aboard, she could take a paddle and push herself off, as we had seen her doing, into the open water.

I am not going to pretend, of course, that Mary was an expert oarswoman. On the other hand, she was quite able to get the skiff under way, alternately paddling and poling with the scull.

But I did not often allow her to go afloat alone, for fear that she would run aground at some distance from the shore and give us a great deal of trouble in rescuing her.

Mary cannot swim. For that matter, I would not care myself to run the risk of trying to swim in that lake, for the long floating weeds would wrap themselves round my legs and drag me down.

Consequently, Mary was only supposed to go alone in the skiff when either Jock, the gardener, or I held a long rope which we specially attached to the painter. She knew that very well, but to-day she was excited, and she hadn't waited for us: I fancy she was rather piqued at Peter's obvious disapproval and anxious to exhibit her cleverness.

In any case, I wasn't going to let her run any more risk of going aground, and I called to her to come back.

Peter imagined that she wouldn't come. He had not yet seen how Mary is trained to be obedient.

" Alternately paddling and poling with a scull."

When she heard me calling to her she looked around at once, and very soon she grasped what I wanted her to do. She clambered across to the stern of the boat, and began punting with a great deal of effort in the direction of the shore. The current of the stream which runs through the lake and on through my garden helped, of course, as much as Mary's efforts; and in a surprisingly short time the boat was at our feet, and Mary had scrambled out and was busy tying the chain once more to the stake.

Peter got into the boat. "Clever little beast," he said.

"Look here, Peter," I suggested, "Mary always comes on the lake with me after tea. She goes to bed at six, but from four o'clock till then is her play-hour: her's and Tommy's and Robin's. You won't mind the usual programme being kept to, I suppose? I mean, you won't mind their coming into the boat with us, will you?"

It was perhaps the crucial test. I could see

that Peter was struggling with his old doubt and hesitation.

" I don't mind Tom," he said at last.

" And Mary ? " I persisted.

" Oh, I suppose so," said Peter, and the victory was won. " Rather fun to see what she does," he added.

" Well, you 'll have to scull," I said, and that satisfied him.

Mary and the terrier enjoyed being on the water, as they always do. Tommy scampered about in the bottom of the boat, jumping over the thwarts, standing on his hind legs in the bows to peer over the side, and now and again scuffling with Mary when she tried to oust him from a favoured position.

Mary was even more restless. During a part of the time, she sat on my knee, but after a minute or two of that she would want to take a scull from Peter and lend a hand with the work.

After a while she perched herself on the gunwale,

"Mary got very busy, pulling at the reeds."

in the stern, and got very busy with one hand down in the water, pulling at the reeds as the boat went past them. Then she went to the bows and began playing the same game.

The lake is in many places very shallow, but there is a channel where the stream runs through it, and with careful steering it is just possible to reach the head of the lake by keeping to this channel. Peter, of course, was not used to the lake, and as we didn't carry a rudder, he soon ran aground. He put all his strength into backing-water in an effort to get afloat again, but the skiff wouldn't move; and when at last he happened to look up and caught me laughing, he began to get annoyed about it. After all, he was hot with his struggles.

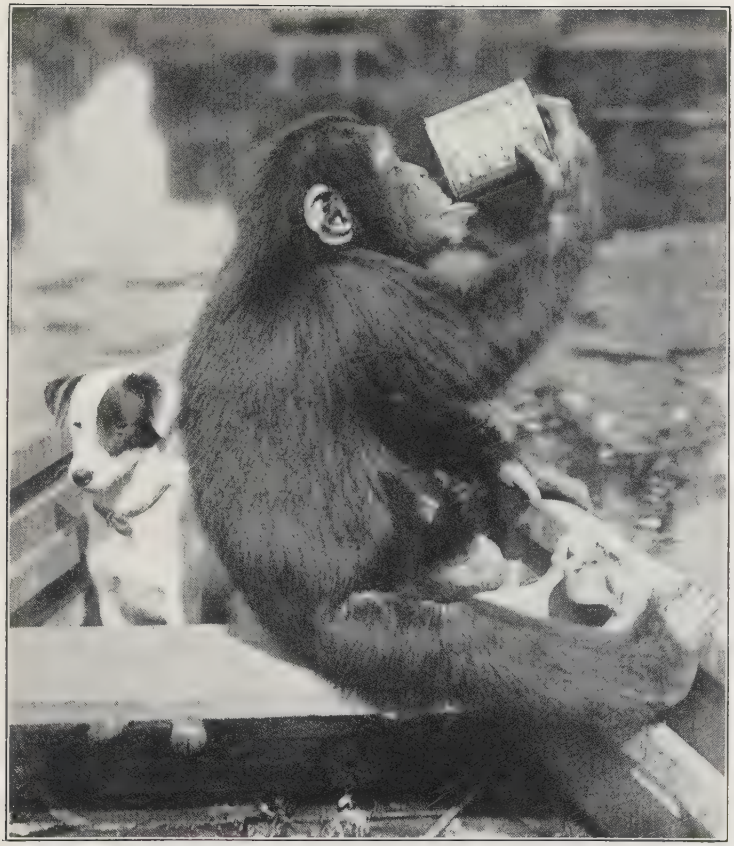
"All very well to laugh," he said. "You come and have a pull at these. It 's jolly hard work. We must have got right on to a sand-bank."

"You 're tied up," I said.

"Tied?" echoed Peter, and he turned round.

Then he saw what I had seen several minutes before. Mary was in the bows, very happy because the going aground had put an extra large clump of reeds within her reach. She had half hauled them into the boat, and it was the weight of these water-logged weeds, half in the lake and half in the boat, that fixed the skiff immovably, in spite of all Peter's struggles.

When I had persuaded Mary to let go of the weeds, and we were steering our way carefully up the channel, she looked around for something fresh to do. There was water in the well of the boat, and an old tin that I use for baling. Mary decided to make herself useful in clearing out the water; and for some minutes she was very busy, filling the tin and emptying it over the side. Then it suddenly occurred to her that that was a waste of good water, and instead of throwing it away she decided to make a better use of it. So she held the tin to her mouth, stuck out her long lower lip to catch the drops, and began to drink! I am afraid



" She held the tin to her mouth and began to drink."

she was not very pleased when I, knowing the condition of the water, insisted that her thirst must remain unquenched till she got ashore.

Beside the lake runs a pathway across the fields, and I noticed that on this were gathered a number of children and one or two older people, all intently watching our boat.

" You 've got quite a crowd of spectators," I told Peter.

" By Jove, yes," he said, and he straightened his back and settled down to a piece of exhibition sculling, feathering in the most approved fashion. Unfortunately, in the middle of it, he caught a crab and went over backwards on to the top of Tommy, who yelped and scampered over to me in the stern.

" Bother ! " said Peter. " Just as I was getting along."

He seemed crestfallen that his little exhibition had failed, so I hastened to put him at his ease.

"You needn't bother," I said. "No one troubled to watch you: they didn't see how decently you were pulling, any more than they saw your 'crab.' They 've only got eyes for Mary. She 's quite the heroine of the district! People come here instead of going to the cinema. Do you know that on the last Bank Holiday we had a hundred and fifty people on that path, and if only I had been able to pass round the hat, I could have made my fortune!"

Like everyone else who has ever seen her, Peter by this time was becoming thoroughly interested in Mary. He had quite forgotten his first disappointment, and now he wanted me to tell him all I could about what Mary did, what she ate, where she slept, and so on. I promised that he should see everything for himself, but he didn't want to wait for that.

"Tell me some of the clever things she can do," he said; but I really didn't know where to start.

" If I was on this lake alone," I said, " and I was wanted for anything at the house, the gardener would say to Mary, ' Go and fetch the Boss.' She 'd run straight to the water's edge, and as soon as she saw me she would clap her hands till I heard the signal."

" She couldn't shout to you, could she ? " Peter asked.

" Well," I answered, " she can't talk in words ; but she can give those funny quick grunts and shouts that you heard her give when she was trying to scare the rubber kitten. And she can understand what is said to her."

Peter stopped paddling and rested on his sculls. " Do you mean that she understands what we are saying now ? " he demanded.

" At any rate," I said, " she knows that we are talking about her. Can't you see how self-conscious she looks ? " And, indeed, Mary had put on a sentimentally self-satisfied expression which was comical to see.

"As a matter of fact," I explained, "there are just certain words which she understands, and she always notices them, whatever the context. If I was now to pronounce the word which is spelt t-e-a—you see that I am not going to say it—although she has already had her meal she would get so excited that she might easily upset the boat. There 's another word which I mustn't pronounce —b-e-d. If I said that, short of picking her up and carrying her, we should never get her to come ashore. She knows it isn't time for that, and if she heard it, she 'd either want to stay on the lake, or else she 'd jump ashore before we were ready for her, run to the trees at the side of the lake, climb about fifty feet up one of them, and sit waiting for us to come and catch her : and if we made the attempt, she 'd wait till we were nearly up to her level, then run along a branch and swing down on it till she could clutch a branch of the next tree, and so make her way from tree to tree. You should ask Jock about that ! He had the job of catching her among the

trees one night, and it took him three-quarters of an hour : and even then he only did it by pretending that he was hurting Tommy, so that Mary came to the rescue and let herself be caught ! "

I had forgotten, as I was telling this tale, that I had more than the one listener. Mary was listening too, and though she can hardly have understood much of it, she apparently gathered, from the last sentence, that I was saying something about the terrier. She left her seat on the thwart beside me, and went " forrard " and began an exciting scuffle with the dog. I don't know what she was trying to do, but it was certainly not what she actually did accomplish. Tommy broke loose, but found himself cornered in the bows of the boat. Trying to escape from Mary, he jumped on to the gunwale : there he tottered for a moment, lost his balance, and with a splash fell into the lake.

Of course he could swim, and there was no harm done ; but it was touching to see Mary's anxiety. She stood up, grasping the gunwale

with one hand while with the other she reached down into the water, making frantic grabs at Tommy : at his head, his collar, his legs, at anything that seemed within her reach.

Before either Peter or I could come to the rescue, she grasped him by the leg. The little beast yelped, but Mary seemed to know the rule that when rescuing anyone from drowning you must not heed the victim's struggles. Poor Tommy got a mouthful of lake-water as his hind-quarters went up and his head went down, and a second later, much to the damage of Peter's socks and my trousers, an exceedingly damp little dog was shaking himself in the bottom of the boat.

Then, to our surprise, and also I must confess to our amusement, Mary behaved exactly as nursemaids do when their charges have escaped being run over : she started to slap Tommy and to box his ears ! But directly he whimpered she was sorry for him again, and showed her friendship by kissing him.

" Tommy fell with a splash into the lake."

" Mary reached down into the water and grasped him by the leg."

" They 're jolly good chums," said Peter, then. " Jolly keen to get him out, wasn't she ? "

" Mary 's a real little friend," I said. " If she thought anyone she loved was in danger, nothing would stop her from trying to rescue him."

That is, perhaps, the best of Mary's characteristics : but I little knew, as I spoke, how she was soon to prove it both to me and to Peter.

CHAPTER FOUR

PLAYTIME IN A GARDEN

AFTER leaving the boat, I started down the path towards the lawn, and Mary held out her arm and grasped my hand.

"Take her other hand, Peter," I said; and then the three of us walked in a row, with Mary in the middle holding a hand of each of us, just like a small child learning to toddle. Yet there was very little of the small child about Mary: she was much too strong for that. Indeed, she was more like a tiny acrobat. As we went along the puppy came behind us, sniffing at Mary's heels — an operation which must certainly have tickled her. Suddenly Mary swung her legs forwards and upwards, so that, while still holding our hands,

she turned a complete somersault and remained hanging, upside-down, with the top of her head only an inch or two above the ground. Then we saw the reason of her manœuvre. She was hanging head downwards, but that didn't matter to her, for there is an instinct in the chimpanzee family which enables them to swing from the boughs of trees in any position : and now, instead of having her back to Tommy, she was facing him and ready to meet his playful attacks with teeth as well as with feet.

" She 's jolly heavy," said Peter. " She 'll come an awful bump on her head if she gets tired and lets go."

" There 's no fear of that," I answered. " Mary could tire you out twenty times over, and me, too, for that matter. She 'll never let go until she wants to, and then she 'll do it in a way that will enable her to swing her legs safely and gently to the ground."

A minute later, as we reached the lawn, Mary

reversed her somersault as I had said she would do, and re-appeared the right way up.

" Should think she 'd have a headache after that," said Peter, but Mary was quite unconcerned. She let go of our hands and ran in front of us across the grass, climbing on to the bank at the end of the lawn and sitting down to watch us.

Tommy did not follow her this time. Instead, he ran to one side and disappeared among the thick clumps of golden rod in the flower-bed. Then he re-appeared, with Robin the mongoose at his heels.

" Now you 'll see a fight," I told Peter, and we sat down on the bank, one on either side of Mary, to see the fun. Tommy was very quick on his feet, as all fox-terrier puppies are, and he ran round and round Robin, jumping in with a snap of his sharp young teeth and springing back into safety.

To Peter the struggle seemed unfair : " like a Rugger-player tackling a cripple," he said. But

" Robin had his own methods of defence."

Robin had his own methods of defence and attack. He couldn't turn and twist as the puppy could, but he could jump. In my Kentish garden he was fighting a puppy in play; in his native wilds he would have been fighting in deadly earnest against snakes — fighting for his life. When a snake approached, the mongoose would have waited till it was almost near enough to strike, but not quite, and then he would have leapt with a curious spiral motion straight into the air, and have come down exactly where he had been a minute before, but now right on top of the snake.

He used exactly the same tactics in dealing with Tommy, and very funny it was to see the puppy's bewilderment. There was, of course, one vital difference between a snake and a fox-terrier: the snake is longer, and consequently it takes more time for the whole of him to pass a given spot. The mongoose, jumping straight into the air, could be certain of coming down close behind the snake's head: a vital spot, and at the

same time a position in which she was safe from the snake's fangs. But the puppy had got a yard or two past the spot by the time Robin reached the ground again. So Tommy escaped being bitten, which was as well for him; but he never could make out where the mongoose had got to. He was used to the idea of jumping forward, but this trick of jumping straight up into the air always puzzled him. For a minute he would stand amazed, pulled up short in his run, looking to right and to left, and wondering where on earth Robin had gone. Then he would turn round, and as soon as he recovered his wits and made another dash, the mongoose leapt again and came down once more behind him.

It was great fun for us, and both Peter and I could have watched the struggle and Tommy's discomfiture by the hour. But Mary grew impatient. She liked to have a hand in whatever fun was on the programme. So she got down off the bank, ran to the door of the studio, and returned

with a long, torn strip of rag. She carried it with one hand, the end trailing behind her, and when Tommy saw it he forgot all about the puzzling and, I suppose, aggravating, mongoose, and came for a game with Mary : while Robin, disappointed at being left, sat up on her hind legs and tail to watch.

Tommy leapt at the piece of rag, fastened his teeth into it, and began a great tug-of-war.

In a competition strictly according to the rules of the Amateur Athletic Association Tommy wouldn't have had a chance ; but this was catch-as-catch-can, and when the puppy found that he couldn't pull the rag out of Mary's grasp by sheer force, he ran round to one side very suddenly and twisted it round her so that she had to turn sharply, and in turning she lost her grip.

Tommy was away in a second, scampering across the lawn with the rag trailing behind him and Mary in full cry behind the rag.

Mary's gait was neither run nor walk. Some-

times she went on two limbs and sometimes on four. Now she would run like a bent old man, then she would go down with the backs of her hands to the ground and gallop along, and then again she would stand more or less upright and make frantic snatches as she went at the trailing piece of material. In the end she was successful, and the tug-of-war began once more, to continue until I provided a new distraction.

I took an old boot, which I kept for these games, a woollen jersey and a dilapidated hat of feminine origin. Mary was a lady, and, much as she liked a frolic, that was as nothing compared with the chance of "dressing up." She left Tommy to exhaust himself with the possibilities of the rag, and darted towards the hat and the boot. The hat she put on at once, and very comical she looked, for it was far too big and fell forward over her eyes. Next, with my assistance, she donned the jersey. Then she sat down to consider what could best be done with the boot.

It also was far too large for her, for it had once been mine, but she put it on and stood up. It made her feet feel uneven, and she looked round for its partner. This had not been produced that evening, but Mary was not to be outdone. Holding the hat tight to her crown with one hand, she crossed the lawn to where Peter sat on the bank and took hold of his foot.

" What 's she going to do ? " cried Peter, and I told him to wait and see. Mary set to work at once to untie the bow of his shoe-lace, and began to pick out the lacing bit by bit. Then she pulled the shoe off Peter's foot and put it on her own. She stood up, with the hat at a rakish angle on her head, one of Peter's shoes on one foot and the larger one of mine on the other. " Grunt, grunt," she said, to show her pride and satisfaction in being properly dressed.

At that moment Jock, the gardener, appeared, ready to roll the lawn. Jock is a very great friend of Mary's, and she would leave any game to be

with him. She would even leave the major delight of donning fine raiment.

She shuffled out of the two shoes and dragged the hat behind her by its ribbon. She sprang on to the garden roller, and struggled to keep her balance, like a circus clown, with swift feet on its shiny, revolving surface, as Jock pushed it forwards. That was beyond her, and Mary knew her limitations. She left the roller, and made for the hose, which Jock had left in a corner of the lawn. She unrolled it from its frame and laid the nozzle on the ground. Then she came back, found the end that had to be attached to the water-pipe, dragged it forwards, and set to work to screw it into position.

Next she went back to the nozzle and turned the tap. The long hose wriggled as the water came through it, and then the stream came out in a long spray on to the grass.

That attracted Tommy. He was thirsty, and he knew, if no one else did, that a hose was meant,

Daily Mirror Photograph.

"She turned the tap."

of course, to provide refreshment. He ran towards Mary and began to try and catch the drops as they raced past him. He probably caught half a dozen on his little red tongue, and he collected a hundred or two more on his face and his back, his legs and his tail.

Mary thought that a poor way to behave. Tommy was an excellent friend to play with, but of course his was only one of the minor intelligences of the animal kingdom. He couldn't expect to do things as a chimpanzee would do them. Still, she was generous and would give him a lesson. Besides, she was thirsty herself.

She turned off the tap, but still kept her hand on it. Then she bent down and put the end of the nozzle in her mouth, and turned on the tap once more. That was, of course, distinctly a sign of her very superior intelligence. Unfortunately, with her mind distracted by the idea of getting her lips into exactly the right position, she forgot that the tap would have to be turned very slowly

and very gently : she turned it full on all at once, and got the whole force of the water down her throat.

She leapt back about a yard, and stood wiping her mouth with the back of her hand. Then she thought of a better way of drying her face—for the water, as she sprang back, had spread all over her—and she ran to the old piece of rag and began vigorously to dry herself.

" Jock," I cried, " you 'd better give her some exercise after that," and Jock hadn't the slightest objection. He set down the handle of the roller, and came into the middle of the lawn. He called to Mary, and she came scampering across the grass, with Tommy at her heels. Then Jock sat down with Mary on one side of him and Tommy on the other : he put an arm round each of them and began whirling like a Catherine Wheel, pushing himself round with his feet. Round and round the three of them went, sometimes with the two animals on opposite sides of Jock, sometimes with

" Tommy was an excellent friend to play with."

both on one side, sometimes in a general confusion of man, dog and ape.

Suddenly Jock stopped and got up. "I 'm giddy after that," he said. "Play with yourselves;" and Mary and Tommy began the wildest scramble that Peter had ever seen, a sort of combination of dance and wrestling match. Mary got one of her long arms round Tom's body, very much as Jock had held him a minute before, and Tommy answered by nipping Mary's left leg with his teeth. Mary lay on her back and held Tommy in the air, and then Tommy wriggled down to the ground again and Mary rolled on top of him. Tommy snapped at Mary, and Mary grunted when she felt his teeth, and then Mary twisted Tommy's leg or bit his ear, and Tommy yelped in his turn. But it was all in the best of good temper, and when at last the two of them rolled apart Tommy was laughing with the delight that only a dog can show, and Mary was grunting cheerfully in her excitement.

Jock, rested now, called her again. She ran to him and lay down on her back at his feet. He turned her so that her head was towards him and put his hands on the soles of her feet, taking a tight hold. Mary put her long fingers round his two wrists, and then he swung her upwards until she was in an erect position above his head, standing on his hands and stooping to retain her hold on his wrists.

" Stand up, Mary," he cried, and then Mary let go her hold and stood upright on his hands, far above his head.

" Clap your hands, Mary," cried Jock, and obediently Mary clapped her hands, like an acrobat trying to prove the cleverness with which he retained his balance.

" I say," cried Peter, " that 's jolly smart, you know ! Let 's see if I can do it."

At the first attempt he had Mary the wrong way round, and though she held on to his wrists, Jock had to come and show him how to get the

"Tommy was laughing."

correct grip. Then Peter lifted Mary off the ground, swung her two or three times back and forwards between his legs, and tried to straighten his back and lift her up. But she was too heavy for him. He lifted her level with his chest, and then his strength gave out suddenly, so that his muscles relaxed ; and Mary would have come with a bump to the ground if she had not let go of Peter's wrists and fallen forward on her hands.

" She is jolly heavy," said Peter, rubbing his biceps. " Heavier than she looks."

" I know," I said. " If you saw her swinging on a tree and jumping from the end of one branch to the next, you 'd think she must be as light as a feather ; but she weighs far more than a child of her own size. And as for strength—well, try a tug-of-war with her."

Peter by this time was ready to try any sort of sport with Mary, but by now the little chimpanzee's attention was otherwise occupied. She had turned again to Jock, as soon as Peter set her free, and

he, holding her hands at arms' length, was turning round and round so that her feet were lifted off the ground and she too went round and round, just as small children love to be lifted and spun round in the nursery. She was giddy at the end of it, and when Jock let go of her hands she could hardly stand; but even that couldn't keep her quiet, for since she could not stand she lay down on her back and once more started rolling on the ground with Tommy.

Then she invented a sort of game of "King of the Castle." There was a steep bank at one end of the lawn which met a stone wall at the corner. Mary climbed on to the wall, and stood daring the puppy to fetch her down. Tommy, not to be outdone, ran at the steep bank. But as soon as he was half-way up, Mary leapt from the top of the wall, caught Tommy round the body with one of her arms, and down the slope they rolled, one over the other. Then Mary let go and pulled herself to the top of the wall again, and

once more Tommy ran at the slope, only to be caught again and rolled down on to the lawn.

Peter by now was thoroughly enjoying himself. He roared with laughter at some of Mary's antics, and when she had a tussle with Tommy he yelled with excitement, dancing round them and shouting, " Go it, Tommy ! " " Catch him, Mary ! " " Oh, well done ! " and then running after Tommy across the grass. And when at last Jock had lifted Mary into his arms and taken her away to the studio where she slept, Tommy frisking at his heels, Peter turned to me. " I say, Uncle Cherry," he said, " I 'm jolly glad I came."

" Not missing the fellows now ? " I suggested.

" Oh, rather not," he answered. " Mary and Tommy are such sports, aren't they ? "

CHAPTER FIVE

MARY GOES TO SCHOOL

"PETER," I said at breakfast the next morning, "do you feel ready for a ten-mile walk?"

"Rather," he answered; and then he added, perhaps a little shyly, "Can we take Mary and Tom?"

I laughed. "Mary is three years old," I said, "and Tommy is something less than six months. Ten miles is rather far for them, isn't it?"

"Then they can't come?" asked Peter, and I had to assure him that it was impossible.

For a minute or two Peter was silent, while he helped himself to porridge. I was glad to see that he was getting the appetite which comes from even one day in the heart of the country. Then Peter looked up at me.

" You know, Uncle Cherry," he said, " I don't know that I 'm awfully keen on that walk, if you don't mind. I 'd just as soon hang about the garden."

" And play with Mary and Tommy and Robin," I suggested with a smile.

Peter laughed, a little shamefacedly. " Well, they are good fun," he said.

So we didn't get our walk, and I was glad. Walking for the sake of walking is no great amusement to me : it is only a method of getting from one of Nature's show-places to another, from the moor-hen's nest at the end of my garden to the home of the otter in a neighbouring stream. On the other hand, I am no idler ; I am never so happy as when working in my garden, building rockeries, planning waterfalls, constructing systems of pipes to carry the water-power that supplies me with electricity. And the joy of this is all the greater when I have an intelligent and admiring companion : when, for example, Mary comes to help me build,

dragging and lifting stones for me, and even taking a trowel and digging up the earth.

Once I had set to work to build a porch at the entrance of Mary's studio. This was not because of any shortage of skilled workmen in the neighbourhood, but because I like to prove that I can do things for myself : and as a matter of fact, bricklaying is one of the most satisfying occupations within the compass of man's work. I designed that porch myself, and then I began the building of it. It was, perhaps, two feet high, when Mary appeared on the scene. She watched with the greatest interest. Then she went to the mortar that I had mixed, stirred it with her finger, and then licked the finger, very gingerly, to see if the taste was good.

Apparently she was satisfied ; but when she scooped up a handful and put it in her mouth, I thought I must interfere. But I realised just in time that she was not going to eat the mortar : this was merely her way of carrying it. She went

"Mary came to help me build."

to the half-built wall and stood beside me. Then with her tongue she pressed forward the mortar on to the bricks and began to smooth it, as I was doing, and afterwards she fetched more bricks and laid them in position. There are three bricks in that porch on which I have scratched Mary's name, in token of the fact that by her they were " well and truly laid."

On this, the second day of Peter's visit, we went down to the shed directly after breakfast. We opened the door, and found Mary making her bed : that is to say, she was straightening the great heap of straw on which she slept in one corner of the room. The various straws that had fallen on the floor she picked up one by one, and then she smoothed out the bundle and dug a hollow, like a nest, in the middle of it.

When she was satisfied that it would be comfortable for the night, she ran across to Jock and stood holding his hand.

" Lesson time, Mary," he said, and obediently

she went to a table that stood in the middle of the floor and climbed on to it. Tommy was called, and he appeared out of his kennel. But Tommy was far less obedient. Perhaps because he was younger than Mary, he took less readily to the idea of "school," and it took some coaxing from Jock before he would go towards where Mary sat on the table.

"Help him up, Mary," said Jock, and Mary reached down, caught Tommy by the collar, and lifted him, with his four legs waving in the air, on to the table.

"Now," said Jock, "die for the King, both of you," and at once Mary lay on her back, with arms and legs pointing upwards above her, and Tommy lay down beside her in the approved "dead dog" attitude. "Up again," cried Jock, and both sat up at once, Mary appearing a trifle bored and Tommy looking thoroughly mischievous, like a small boy who is waiting till the schoolmaster shall look the other way.

"'Die for the King,' said Jock."

Mary then showed us what she had learnt to do. At the word of command, she clapped her hands, she saluted, she stood on her head; a bell was given her and she rang it; she powdered her nose; she put on some clothing and took it off again; she took a pair of dumb-bells and did some arm-exercises. Then she went to the carpenter's bench, picked out a nail and a hammer, and drove the nail into a piece of wood.

"I don't see," said Peter, "why you want to teach her things. You aren't going to take her round with an organ, are you?"

"No," I answered, "although as a matter of fact she has been on the stage often enough. When I show cinematograph films I sometimes bring her in front of the audience during the interval. And she likes it. The footlights please her, and when the audience laughs she grunts in reply, and when the people clap she shows them that she can do that as well as they can.

" But," I explained, " I have to let her have lessons every morning, or she wouldn't have any idea of obedience. You remember when she was alone with Tommy in the skiff yesterday afternoon : I called her and she came back at once. That was simply the result of her having been taught to do as she is told. I never have any difficulty with her. She loves these lessons. She sees me driving in a nail and she wants to do it herself. The first time she took the hammer she didn't realise that the nail had a blunt end as well as a sharp one. I said, ' Don't do that, Mary,' and after a few lessons she had learnt, not only which end of a nail goes into the wood, but also the much more important lesson that whenever I say, ' Don't do that, Mary,' she is doing something wrong. I only said, ' Don't do that,' as long as the nail was the wrong way up ; as soon as she turned it, I said, ' That 's right, Mary.' Now she knows that as long as I say ' Don't ' she is doing things wrong, but as soon as I say ' Right '

all is well. Consequently, when she 's out in the garden or on the lake and she starts hurting Tommy or doing something that might tear your clothes or mine, I have only to say, ' Don't do that, Mary,' and she stops at once. That 's how you teach a chimpanzee, and why you teach her."

CHAPTER SIX

MARY AND TOMMY TO THE RESCUE

THE house in which I live stands in a little narrow valley. Down this valley runs a stream, never more than six feet wide, except where it broadens out into lakes as it does in my grounds. The slopes of the fields on either side are grass-covered and sprinkled with trees: it is pasture-land, used for cattle. Up the valley, beside the stream, is the little path to which I have already referred—the one from which the children watch Mary when she goes boating on the lake.

Peter and I set out one morning to explore the valley, and of course Mary and Tommy came too, as we did not mean to go very far, but only to walk along the edge of the stream to another

lake a quarter of a mile beyond the limit of my grounds. It was a chilly day, and consequently Mary had to wear her clothes. She only does this in the evening in the ordinary way; but she is used to a hot climate, and whenever there is any risk of her catching cold I dress her in a warm knitted jersey. She rather likes the comfort of being clothed on these cool days, but I must confess that I do not regard the white jersey as an improvement to her appearance. One day I must get her a coloured one: something in a pleasant green, I think, would suit her, or else a becoming shade of brown.

Mary kept close to us: indeed, for most of the way she held my hand and sometimes one of Peter's too. But Tommy was rarely in sight. He went out on expeditions and adventures of his own, far ahead of us; or else he scrambled to the other bank by means of the fallen stones which here and there made natural waterfalls in the bed of the stream, and then went tearing away up the opposite hill.

" Are there any fish in that stream ? " asked Peter.

" Plenty," I answered. " Nothing very large, but you could get quite a decent morning's sport in some of the little pools. Ask Mary. She knows all about it."

" Mary ? " Peter repeated. " You don't mean to say that she goes fishing ? "

" Of course she does," I said. " Come, we 'll try her."

We had reached a spot where the stream broadened. It could hardly be called a lake : it was rather a pool some eight or ten feet across. A willow-tree grew on the bank and branches overhung the water, casting shade on to its surface.

I went to a dead tree a few yards away and broke off a branch about two feet long. " Have you got a piece of string ? " I asked Peter, and, being a boy, of course he had. I tied the string to one end of the stick, took a pin from my necktie, and began to bend it into a hook.

Mary knew quite well what I was about, and she was tremendously interested. She took hold of the end of the stick and examined the knot with which I had fastened the string, testing it severely with fingers and teeth. Then she wanted to examine the " hook," and, of course, she pricked her finger with the pin.

Mary is always very funny when she has some tiny scratch or prick. She can't let the place alone. Usually, as it happens, the damaged portion of her is her heel; but this presents no difficulty, for she can twist her limbs with ease and bring her heel comfortably within reach of her lips and teeth. Then she sucks at the spot or presses it with her fingers.

Now she sat down on the grass. It was her left hand that had encountered the pin on this occasion, and she proceeded to make a surgical examination with her other hand and her left foot, peering down with very much the expression of a jeweller trying to see into the springs of a watch.

But before long the prospect of fishing in the stream distracted her attention, and soon she ran down the bank to look into the water.

" Will she catch anything ? " asked Peter.

" Ask me another," I said. " I won't pretend that Mary is an expert angler, but if I manage to conceal the hook in the bait, a really young fish *might* be foolish enough to swallow it, and then I think Mary would be able to land him. She wouldn't let go of the rod, in any case, so the fish would have to come ashore sooner or later."

We baited the hook with a worm, and then gave the rod to Mary. She walked down to the edge of the pool, let the line fall into the water, and then sat watching it with exactly that expression of weary patience, of solemn anticipation, which is seen on the faces of river-side fishermen of every nation and every race. Apparently it is not even peculiar to humanity.

Peter was delighted with the sight, and would have liked to have stayed for the catch—if there

"Mary sat fishing with an expression of weary patience."

was one. But I wanted to show him the rest of the valley and the next lake, so I persuaded him to come with me.

It was on our return that the adventure happened.

We were nearly back at the spot where we had left Mary, and Peter was already getting eager to see her " catch," when suddenly we heard a little child crying. Looking over the paling, I saw a herd of cattle browsing quietly. At the foot of the hill sat a little girl, who may have been three years old, picking buttercups. It was not from her that the cry had come, however, but from a child a few years older who was struggling to get through a small gap in the paling through which, I suppose, the baby must have scrambled when her sister was looking elsewhere.

This child heard us approaching and came running toward me. Tearfully, she explained that her little sister had wandered into the field and up the hill : and then we learnt the cause

of her terror. She had been told that there was a bull in the field, and she knew that the great savage bull would kill her little sister.

As a matter of fact, as I knew very well, there was a bull in the field, although it wasn't likely to be in the least dangerous. Still, that wasn't the place for a baby girl to pick buttercups.

We called to her, as her sister had already done, but she was intent on the flowers and didn't hear us.

" Better go and fetch her out," I said to Peter, and he looked for a place where he could climb the fence. Unfortunately, that paling had been built for a man who believed in the rights of individual property—at any rate, when it was his own. It was nearly six feet high, and well studded with barbed wire that was orange with rust : a nasty-looking obstacle for even the most expert climber. There wasn't much of a foot-hold, and the only possible place for a hand-hold was in the midst of the wire.

I was considering whether I could pick Peter up and throw him over the top of the paling (though how he would ever have got back I do not know), when suddenly Peter called out that Tommy had got through the hole that had already proved large enough to admit the baby girl.

" Tommy will scare them off," cried Peter, and really I thought that that might be an easy solution of the difficulty. Tommy could drive the cows (and the bull) to the top of the hill, the guardian-sister would dry her tears, the infant would finish picking buttercups and come back through the hole, and we should be able to resume our walk.

But though Tommy went for the cattle readily enough, his attack didn't have the effect we desired. On the contrary. Even the cows were roused from lethargy when a tiny puppy yapped at their heels, and the bull came down the hill, feeling, apparently, that it was time to assert himself and expel the invaders.

Things began to look as if after all there might be an element of danger in them for the child, and I took off my coat in order to throw it on to the barbs while I made the best of my way over the fence.

Suddenly I heard a noise behind me. Turning, I saw Mary. The noise we had made and the yelping of Tommy must have attracted her attention, for she had left the pool and come, still clutching her fishing-rod, to see what was the matter.

When she saw us she didn't need any explanation. From the path she jumped at the paling, was at the top of it in a second, swung herself over, and dropped to the ground within the field. Then, with the amateur fishing-rod in one hand, and giving a whole chorus of wild grunts in her excitement, she ran forward, straight for the bull, where it stood a few feet in advance of the rest of the herd.

Whether or not Mary knew the scientific methods

"With the amateur fishing-rod in one hand she ran forward."

of catching fish, it is certain that, at any rate, she knew how to deal with cattle. She didn't worry about snapping at their heels, as Tommy had done. She used her fishing-rod. With that as a stick, she beat the bull on its hind-quarters, until the bull began to think better of his plan to assert himself.

The bull turned. As if it had signalled to them, the herd of cows turned too and hustled away farther up the hill, the bull bringing up the rear, still feeling the sharpness of Mary's rod.

But I couldn't let Mary continue the pursuit indefinitely, so I called her and obediently she came back. Unfortunately, she appeared to think that her work of rescuer was not finished. I say unfortunately, for the child was almost as much frightened of her as of the bull, and though Mary could, I think, have picked up the baby and carried her quite gently, the child would have been terrified almost out of its life. So I sacrificed my coat, and with its aid succeeded in getting across

the high fence without a scratch. I carried the little buttercup-picker back to its guardian, and then climbed back to the pathway, wishing, as I fingered the holes in my coat, that fences were no more of an obstacle to me than they were to Mary.

" Mary knew how to deal with cattle."

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE MYSTERIOUS PYTHON

AS may be imagined, there is constantly a great deal of work to be done in a large garden and grounds such as mine : far more, of course, than I could possibly do with my own hands. Anything that requires to be designed—a fountain, for instance, or an artificial waterfall—I construct myself, bringing the stones, arranging them and fixing them in position with mortar. But there are many more arduous jobs than these. There is the tiresome one of clearing the lake of weeds. A little while ago there was the laying of the lawn. And there is now a new boat-house being built for the skiff.

Consequently, I have to keep several men continually at work. In the first place there is

Jock, who looks after Mary and Tommy and Robin, and has a good deal to do as well in the garden. There is a second man to help with the garden work; and from time to time there are various men for digging and clearing and building.

While Peter was with me there were four men besides Jock and the gardener, and when Peter hadn't anything else to do he used to go and watch them at work.

One morning, while I was busy sawing planks for the enlargement of the verandah in front of the house, Peter came running up, in a state of great excitement.

"I say, Uncle Cherry," he exclaimed, "I didn't know you went in for snakes!"

"Snakes?" I repeated. "Well, do I?"

"The workmen say there's a terrific snake in the grounds," said Peter: "a python."

"Oh," I said, "you mean poor old Sam. What have you heard about him?"

"Well," Peter explained, "I was talking to

the builder, round at the back of the studio, you know, and when I said I wanted to go to the far side of the lake, he said I oughtn't to because that was where the snake was. I asked about it, and he said that you kept a python, a huge thing eighteen feet long, and that if it caught anyone it could kill him in three seconds. I say," he added, " do come and show it to me ! "

" Sure you want to see it ? " I said.

" Rather," said Peter. " I can't think why you didn't bring it out before. Awful fun, of course, having Mary and Tommy and Robin ; but a python ! Why, that 's a real wild animal ! Do come along and show me."

I was then in something of a difficulty. I hadn't found anyone before who had shown any eagerness to meet the python : indeed, it was usually the other way about. Most of my visitors did not show the enthusiasm that Peter was exhibiting at the idea of a fully-grown python that might at any moment come slithering through the grass

and then could wind itself around them and crush them to death in a matter of seconds. In fact, I have known tea-parties broken up at the mere mention of Sam the python, and to the workmen in my garden he was a constant terror.

The scare had begun several months earlier, soon after I bought the house. A party of six men had arrived the day before, and had started preparing a stretch of land with the idea of levelling it and planting it with grass, so that it could become my lawn. On the second afternoon I went down to see how the work was progressing, and was surprised to find no one at work. Wondering what had happened, I went in search of the men, and presently I found them, sitting by the edge of the lake, smoking and talking, while one of them had thrown out a fishing-line in the hope of providing himself with some supper.

They all scrambled to their feet as I approached.

"Ah," I said, "you are having a rest. All right. Only," I added, "I shouldn't wander too far away

from the lawn if I were you, or the python might catch one or two of you."

"Python?" echoed one of the men. "You haven't got a python?"

"Haven't you seen it yet?" I asked. "A python twelve feet long? Fully grown and rather fierce," I added.

Those six men went back to the lawn without losing another moment. I looked at them from time to time as I went about my work that day, and I noticed that they were very careful to keep together in a group, and that as they worked they continually looked with suspicion across the garden.

For three days, however, the python failed to put in an appearance, and the fears which the news of him had excited gradually quietened. Caution relaxed, and occasionally a man would stray from the group. By the fourth morning all the men had regained their courage, and I think they had even come to regard the

python as a myth. So courageous and unconcerned did they feel, indeed, that from time to time one or more of them would leave the work on the lawn, in the heat of the day, and sit in the shade under the trees.

It was on that day that I happened to be showing a friend round the garden. When we reached the half-made lawn I found only two men at work. It was rather a windy morning, and the fine grass on the hill-side was blowing in the breeze, while the leaves of the trees moved to and fro and brought the only relief that could be found in the sweltering heat.

Suddenly I pointed to a spot on the hill just beyond the fence.

"Do you see that movement in the grass?" I said to my friend; "there, where the blades are all turned back? Do you think that could be Sam?"

"Who 's that?" asked my friend. "Another of your pets?"

" Sam ? " I repeated. " Oh, of course, you haven't met him. Sam the python, you know ! "

The two workmen were staring at me with wide-open eyes.

" Is that there python a-comin' ? " demanded one of them. " Hi, Bill, where 's that pick ? "

" Oh," I said soothingly, " it 's quite a long way off, and pythons don't travel more than ten feet a second. Even if Sam came straight here, you 'd have three minutes to get ready—provided of course, that you knew it was coming. But there 's no great danger if you all keep together and don't wander far away. A python would prefer the long grass : he wouldn't be at all likely to come out here in the open."

That, as far as it went, was well enough. The python had not so far claimed a victim, and there seemed no great reason why anyone should be caught by him in the immediate future, considering what careful precautions the men took from that time onwards.

And meanwhile the work on the lawn progressed rapidly.

But, unfortunately, a day or two later, I brought in an extra man to help to draw the weeds from the lake. Still more unfortunately, this man had been a soldier in India.

His work kept him on the lake by himself, but at the dinner-hour he joined the other men on the lawn. Of course, he wanted to know why one stood six feet away, continually turning from side to side to peer among the bushes and flowers, and then away at the grass on the hill-side. So he learnt the story of Sam the python ; and having, as I have said, spent some years in India, he knew a good deal about pythons and their habits and, particularly, about the danger of meeting them at close quarters. What had been instinct to the six men in the garden was confirmed in the gravest fashion by this expert on the natural history of the tropics. He it was who caused the length of the python to grow from twelve feet to eighteen ;

he it was who related the number of seconds in which a python could strangle a man, and in support of his statement he produced some peculiarly hair-raising stories of adventures with pythons in the jungles of India.

And then he got up in a hurry and went home to consult his wife.

By this time I had gathered what was happening, and I began to fear that the lake would be left unweeded. And so doubtless it would have been from that moment if the old soldier's wife had been of a less sturdy temperament.

At any rate, the man re-appeared later in the afternoon, and continued his work, although whenever I passed within half a dozen yards of him he was muttering about " people who kept all these 'ere dangerous wild animals." He was in a thoroughly nervous state, and the slightest noise made him jump from his work and look around with an expression of terror.

On the next afternoon the python achieved

the victory. It was a squally afternoon, and gusts of wind came now and again to blow the leaves about and in particular to make a loose piece of felt on the top of the boat-house flap to and fro. The authority on Indian pythons spent more time in turning round to protect himself from the creeping monster than he did in removing weeds from the lake, and by tea-time he threw down his tools and came in search of me.

"Look here, mister," he said. "You can keep them there pets of yours, if that 's the kind of thing you like ; but you can't keep me. The missis says I 'm a coward, but she don't know what I know about pythons. I 've seen them. I 've seen them kill a man—leastways, I saw the place where it happened. And I know what a python is, I do. It ain't safe, not 'ere, it ain't. And I ain't a-going to stay."

And with that he left. I happened to drop a flower-pot just as he reached the gate, and he started running at a pace that suggested that he

meant to keep it up all the way until he reached the safety of his cottage and the protection of " the missis " who was fortunate enough to know nothing about the habits of pythons.

Well, that is the story of Sam, about which young Peter was questioning me with every sign of eagerness and gusto. The difficulty with small boys is that you never can gauge the extent of their knowledge. Some of them are regular encyclopædias, particularly on the subject of animals that kill people in three seconds and things of that sort. It was quite possible that Peter's knowledge of the habits of the python was as complete as that of the man from India : and in that case I wondered whether he also would decide that my house and garden were " not safe," and whether in a few minutes I should see him also tearing at full speed down the road.

I hadn't really missed the old soldier, because the amount of work which his terror allowed him to do was negligible ; but I didn't want to lose

Peter a minute earlier than was necessary. So I decided to tell him the truth.

"I can't possibly show Sam to you," I began.

"Why not?" demanded Peter. "I wouldn't hurt him."

"No," I said, "I don't think you would. But all the same, I can't show him to you."

"But why not?" Peter insisted.

I did not answer in words. Instead I treated Peter to an elaborate wink, or rather a whole series of winks.

"But why not, Uncle Cherry?" said Peter again.

My eye was beginning to water, but I continued the performance of winking at Peter, without answering his question.

Suddenly the truth dawned on him.

"I say," he cried, "do you mean that there *isn't* a python?"

"Only a mythical one," I explained.

"Oh, I say," said Peter, "what a lark! Do

you mean to say that you made up all about the python just to keep those fellows at work? What a ripping lark!"

"But you mustn't tell anyone," I said.

"Rather not," said Peter, and I must say that he kept his word. Indeed, after I had told him the whole story, he entered into the spirit of the joke all too thoroughly. Two days later I met him returning to the garden from a country walk. In his hand he held a grass snake which he had captured on the hill.

"What are you going to do with that?" I asked.

"Don't you let on, Uncle Cherry," he answered. "I 'm going to take this down to the lawn and tell those fellows that this is a baby python: one of Sam's young ones, you know."

He was disappointed when I stopped him: but I thought that was carrying the joke a bit too far. And I didn't want to lose any more workmen.

CHAPTER EIGHT

ROBIN GOES A-HUNTING

"I SAY, Uncle Cherry," said Peter one morning as we sat at breakfast, "you know what you said before I came, about my ragging with Mary and Tommy and Robin?"

"I do," I answered. "What about it? Hasn't the entertainment come up to scratch?"

"Oh, rather!" said Peter. "Couldn't be better. Mary is most awful fun, and of course Tommy's a jolly little beggar. Only I was thinking that we don't see much of Robin, do we?"

"You would," I answered, "if you knew where to look for him. You see," I explained, "a dog is a domesticated animal, and his best friend is man. You'll find that if a dog has to choose between the society of his master and that of another animal, more often than not he'll choose

" There couldn't be a better entertainment."

to be with his master. Now, a chimpanzee isn't domesticated by nature. She 's a wild animal. You can see that, when Mary gets among the trees. That is her natural life. But she 's imitative, and she gets very easily and quickly into the way of living in a house and a garden.

" But a mongoose isn't domesticated, and it isn't imitative either. We couldn't sit Robin up in a chair and feed him on rock-cakes, you know. He 's very much at home here, he 's not in the least afraid of me, and he has learnt to make use of the house when he wants to. You should see him in winter, for instance. He gets wet and cold outside, and then he comes into my sitting-room to dry himself. He goes straight to the fire and stands or sits in front of it till he 's nice and warm on one side : then he turns around and toasts his back, sitting up all the while with his little front paws crossed over his chest. If only I could give him a newspaper he 'd look exactly like an old gentleman at his club on Christmas morning.

" But that 's about as far towards civilisation as Robin has got. All the rest of the time he 's a mongoose—and a wild mongoose at that. He catches most of his own food in the garden, rats and mice, and so on. Now and then we give him a treat, and we 've found that the head of a chicken or a rabbit is a delicacy to him. But we don't call him into the kitchen as we would do to Tommy. We hide the piece of chicken under a bush, then Robin comes along and thinks himself fearfully clever to be so good a hunter as he must be to find such a treat.

" You ought to watch Robin at the end of one of his hunting expeditions. If he 's had a good day he 's as pleased as Punch."

" Couldn't we watch him this morning ? " suggested Peter. " Nothing special doing to-day."

" Right you are," I said, and as a matter of fact I was by no means unwilling myself to spend the time with Robin. He is, as Peter would say, " a ripping little beast."

"The sort of hunting-ground that Robin considers ideal."

ROBIN GOES A-HUNTING

About eleven o'clock we were stationed in a corner of the garden where the fruit bushes grow : gooseberries, raspberries and currants. There, the garden ends in a roughly-built wall of small rocks, and on the other side, between the bushes and the lawn, is a row of tall clumps of golden rod. That is the sort of hunting-ground that Robin considers ideal.

Soon we heard a scuffling, and out came Robin in full cry after something that passed too swiftly for us to see what it was : but not too swiftly for Robin.

His long tail, which was normally a thin wisp, was now spread out behind him in a way that to Peter seemed almost impossible; but that thickening of the tail is the surest sign that a mongoose is busy and excited.

Past us went Robin, round the golden rod, turning and twisting among the bushes—and then we heard a squeal.

The cry of the vanquished animal — be it

mouse caught by cat, pigeon caught by falcon, eland caught by lion, or anything else—is always painful. But that is Nature's law the world over.

> " Great fleas have little fleas
> Upon their backs to bite 'em,
> And little fleas have lesser fleas—
> And so, *ad infinitum*."

Or perhaps it is more like the rhyme of the old woman who found the crooked sixpence—

> " The cat began to kill the rat ;
> The rat began to gnaw the rope ; "

and so on.

Each animal preys on another form of life that is weaker than itself. Man is no exception. It is Nature's law. No race of creatures can break Nature's law and continue to exist. Life preys on life—on vegetable life even where flesh is not eaten. We must accept the fact.

But that — true though it is — does not serve

to lessen our horror at the squeal of the mouse in the claws of the cat. It did not lessen the horror of both Peter and myself at the squeal of that rat—for rat it proved to be. But at any rate, a mongoose is not cruel. It kills its prey without loss of time.

"What will he do now?" asked Peter. "Is he going to eat it?"

"Oh no," I answered. "Robin is the careful housewife. He keeps a larder, so that if hunting is bad one day there is still something for his dinner. He will take it away and hide it in a little crevice he has scooped out under an overhanging ledge. But first there 's a little ceremony to be performed. Come back to the house and you 'll see."

We went through the house very quietly. I wanted Peter to see without being seen. When we reached the kitchen I told Peter to peep out of the window.

Robin was just outside the closed kitchen

door. The fruit of his hunting expedition lay at his feet. Robin lay still, watching the door.

"What 's he waiting for?" Peter asked.

"Me," I said. "This is one of Robin's little links with civilisation. He will wait there two or three hours if necessary, until I come and look at his capture, pat him on the head, and approve of him. I suppose he wants me to appreciate his cleverness. Or it may be his way of saying Grace. Anyhow, he never fails to do it."

It was a few days after this that Robin distinguished himself by what probably began as only an extra ambitious hunting foray, but ended in somewhat serious trouble. Somehow or other Robin got outside the garden and went down the lane. He hadn't been that way before, and very soon he came to the village, and then, I imagine, he began to get scared. There were people he didn't know. There were a horse, a cart, a motor-car.

Not unnaturally, Robin fled. Unfortunately,

he turned suddenly to the right and darted through an open doorway. One door was shut, but otherwise the house seemed empty. Robin must have had the time of his life, exploring. We found traces of his travels next day, and know that he went into each room in turn.

I imagine that, like all explorers, he wasn't doing all this merely for the fun of the thing. Once more, he was hunting. He had an objective. It may have been food, though I doubt that, for Robin has always a preference for the contents of his own larder. I think he was looking for the very thing that he eventually found : a place where he could lie in comfortable warmth and sleep off the shock that the horse, the cart and the motor-car had given to his nerves.

At any rate, by the time he had finished exploring the ground floor and had climbed the stairs, he found exactly what he wanted : a bed.

" Excellent ! " said he, no doubt.

In he climbed.

He snuggled down well under the bed-clothes, blessed—I hope—the thoughtful provider of such comfort to a nerve-strained mongoose, and fell asleep.

The sequel, of course, was rather terrible. It is not altogether pleasant to clamber into bed and find a live mongoose filling the office of hot-water bottle. Nor, in this case, can it have been any less alarming when, the rightful owner of the bed having leapt out again and having darted out of the room and down the stairs—the mongoose, at least equally alarmed, followed in great haste. I sympathise with the owner of the bed; but I must confess that I have some sympathy also for Robin. If it is unpleasant to find a mongoose in one's bed, surely it is equally unpleasant for the mongoose to have his slumbers broken by the intrusion of two human feet!

CHAPTER NINE

MARY GOES TO BED

AS I have already said, a few of the surprising and amusing things that Mary could do had been taught to her, while the majority she had learned naturally simply by copying Jock or myself when we did them. I must say, frankly, that the things learnt at her 'discipline lessons' never amused me as much as those that came naturally to her. I like a chimpanzee to remain a chimpanzee. I don't want her to become a circus clown.

Take, for instance, the matter of smoking. Once while I was smoking my pipe I gave Mary an old pipe to see what she would do with it. She put it between her teeth because she saw that my pipe was between my teeth. In time she learned

in the same way to fill it and light it and smoke it. It may be drawing rather a fine distinction, but because it is natural for a chimpanzee to be imitative, I regard pipe-smoking as an accomplishment which she has acquired in a natural way. On the other hand, it is not natural for a chimpanzee to pretend to be dead, and she did not learn that by imitation : she had to be laid on her back, and her legs and arms had to be placed in the required attitudes : and the performance had to be repeated morning after morning until she had learnt to take up the position at the word of command. It is clever of animals to learn to do things like that, of course, but they are hardly worthy of Mary's intelligence. Powdering her nose she learnt in that way, although she could have learnt it by imitation if she had happened to live in a lady's boudoir.

Like all apes and monkeys, Mary can be very funny in front of a mirror ; but this amusement has now rather palled. She knows very well what

she looks like, and it always strikes me as odd that if I put before her a book of animal pictures, she will turn over the pages with only moderate interest until she finds a portrait of a member of her own family ; and then, though it may be a new book and she may never have seen that particular picture before, she will put forward her great lips and kiss the page !

Peter thought that one of the strangest of the many odd things that he saw in my garden was when Mary made herself instructress to Tommy. The puppy, of course, was full of admiration for Mary : not only was she an ideal playmate for him, but he recognised her as being cleverer than he was, and he began, without any encouragement from me, to imitate her. The little chap may have been in his own way a trifle jealous ; in any case it really seemed at one time to worry him that he could not do many of the things that Mary did. In particular, it troubled him that I should give food to Mary which he could

not eat. Of course this was so: Mary was a vegetarian. But there, at any rate, Tommy would not be outdone. If Mary ate bananas and plums, why shouldn't he?

And he did.

He not only learned to eat bananas and plums, but he also learned to eat—and apparently to enjoy—raw carrots.

Mary apparently took his discipleship as a compliment. She didn't, of course, offer tit-bits to Tommy: she wasn't as generous as all that. But when I told her to share her food with him she did it without protest. Not only that, but she decided to teach Tommy the most becoming way to eat. She would stand up, take a banana in her hand, and hold it over the puppy's head until he stood up on his hind legs and 'begged' for it.

On wet mornings—and even in glorious Kent it sometimes rains—Peter and I would have Mary in my study, and Peter would put on the table a number of miscellaneous objects just to see what

" She taught Tommy the most becoming way to eat."

she would do with them. I used to let Peter choose whatever he liked, and then he and I would stand aside and watch what use Mary would allot to each article. Sometimes she would be very quick at guessing the right purpose, while with other things she would remain completely mystified. It all depended upon whether or not she had seen the things before.

For instance, the first time she was given a pair of my spectacles she very soon discovered that they were meant to rest on her nose, although she did not so soon grasp that the curved pieces went round the ears.

When she was given a pencil she started rubbing the table with it : I put a piece of paper on the table, and as soon as she saw that the pencil marked the paper she became very happy scratching marks on it, sitting up to the table like an old lady compiling her memoirs. (I wish I could have called it writing, but I am a truthful man : writing is not yet one of Mary's accomplishments.)

On the other hand, a telephone completely mystified her. She turned it this way and that, and, of course, the receiver fell off its stand, causing a bell to ring at the other side of the room. Then she had to climb down from her chair and go and examine the bell : when she found that she could do nothing there to repeat the ring she came back to the receiver, turning it this way and that until by chance the ear-piece slipped again and the bell was rung once more. And then, of course, she had to go and take a further look at the bell.

The use of a broom, of course, was fairly obvious, and it was entirely without instruction that she learnt to push a grass-stalk down my pipe stem in the way of a pipe-cleaner. Keys always fascinated her, and she very soon knew that their place was in the keyhole of a door or a box ; indeed, the sight of a key seemed always to suggest to her that it must be fitted into a hole somewhere or other, and once, when she was given my bunch of keys to play with while we were sitting in the

" Like an old lady compiling her memoirs."

middle of a field, she immediately began, since there was no keyhole available, to try to fit the smallest key into the open end of the largest.

For practical reasons, as soon as she came to me, I showed her how to wash, and to clean her teeth, and to brush her hair, exactly as Toto used to do in my camp in Africa.[1] But she was by nature an exceedingly cleanly little animal, as most chimpanzees are.

Tommy, as I have explained, was her constant playmate, and sometimes Robin the mongoose was allowed to join in the games. But neither Mary nor Tommy seemed to regard Robin as on the same intellectual plane as themselves. He aroused their curiosity and interested them, and often they would stop in the middle of a game and look down at him, as much as to say : " Well, you are a strange creature ! "

I think I have made it clear that Mary was obedient. Not infrequently, of course, she got up

[1] See *My Friend Toto,* pages 48–50.

to mischief, but when she was told not to do a thing she stopped doing it, at any rate at the third or fourth repetition of the command. But, naturally, obeying these orders didn't always please her. In that respect she was just like a child, and sometimes, when for instance she had stolen the best of my hats and was apparently endeavouring to turn it inside out, she would do as she was told; but afterwards she would go and sulk. She would climb on a wall in the garden and sit sucking at her fingers like a spoilt child. Coaxing would be useless: she would have nothing to do with me for ten minutes or more. And then, all of a sudden, she would make up her mind that she had done enough to convince me that I had incurred her displeasure, and she would hop down, reach up her long arms and scramble upwards till she could encircle my neck and give me an affectionate embrace. Then she would jump to the ground again, run round me in a complete circle, and stand waiting for me to start a game

"'Well, you are a strange creature!'"

with her. Needless to say, I did not disappoint her.

Perhaps a part of Mary's general freedom from the more serious forms of naughtiness was due to the fact that I knew by this time her likes and dislikes, and I was careful to avoid misunderstandings. There was, for example, my habit of spelling certain words instead of pronouncing them, which I had been careful to explain to Peter on the first day of his visit.

Peter was very good about that sort of thing. Naturally, he wouldn't have minded a bit if one of the forbidden words had come out by accident; it would have been fun for him, he thought, to see what happened. But for all that, he didn't try the experiment. . . . Not intentionally!

As a matter of fact, though, it was he who used the word that started the climax of his adventures with Mary. It happened one evening, when he and I were playing with Mary in the garden, and it was quite an innocent mistake on his part, for

he thought that Mary was out of hearing. As a matter of unfortunate fact, however, she had crept up behind him unobserved and was actually only a yard away.

Turning to me, Peter said : " Can't Mary sit up a bit late as a special treat ? It 's awful fun with her out here, and I 'm sure she won't want to go to bed ! "

A sound behind us made me turn quickly, but by then the mischief was done. Mary had heard the hated word, and, not understanding the rest of Peter's sentence, she had taken fright and fled at top speed.

" That 's done it, Peter," I cried. " Come along. You go down that path and head her off."

Our dispositions for the pursuit, hastily as they were made, were, I think, rather skilful, and in a few seconds, Jock having come running from the other side of the garden at my call, we had Mary apparently cornered in a little yard under the verandah of the house.

But when we thought that the chase was ended, we had forgotten that it was a chimpanzee that we were dealing with. The ground was blocked for her, by the house behind and by the three of us in front. So she didn't attempt to get free in that way. Instead, she leapt upwards, caught hold of the edge of the verandah and swung herself on to it, leaving us looking helplessly up at her from the ground below.

There she sat on the rail, and she, at any rate, seemed to appreciate the humour of the situation.

Jock, the most determined of our party—for Mary was his especial charge—followed her example : he jumped, got a hold on the floor of the verandah, and began to pull himself up.

As soon as he had had an elbow on the boards and was struggling to swing up a foot, Mary decided that the time had come for a strategical retreat. She tried to get into the house. Fortunately, as we then imagined, but

most unluckily as events proved, all the doors and windows of the house that opened on to the verandah were shut and locked or bolted. So, we thought, Mary was caught again.

But once more she eluded us.

Jock was now grasping the verandah-rail and had one foot on the floor, when Mary gave up trying to open the locked door and turned her attention to the post supporting the roof of the verandah. Up this she climbed, and on to the roof itself.

For anything but a chimpanzee that would have given a precarious foothold, but to Mary it was quite sufficient, and, in any case, she didn't stay there. She found a stack-pipe running up the house and she climbed it with all the skill of an expert burglar. Then she pulled herself over the gutter and reached the roof.

Peter and Jock and I were now standing back on the lawn, looking up at Mary, Peter only with excitement and admiration, Jock indignant

as at a truant child, and I somewhat seriously alarmed.

I wasn't afraid for Mary's safety. She could clamber about on the roof quite as easily as she could on the ground. But the difficulty which Jock had had on previous days in getting her down from the trees would now be repeated: and in all probability the difficulty would be greater still, because Mary would have a keener sense of her own wrong-doing and would be less inclined, in consequence, to obey orders. To evade going to bed, after all, was a minor affair; climbing the house was a much more serious matter, for even her attempts to clamber on to the verandah instead of going up by the steps had been strictly forbidden from the very first. Misbehaving children are always obdurate in direct proportion to the importance of the wrong they are committing: and Mary in that respect was exactly like a child.

It was clear, therefore, that Mary wouldn't

come down of her own accord. It was unlikely that it would even be possible to trick her, and, in any case, that was a ruse that I always disliked. We should have then to go up and fetch her.

Now, I may be tolerably capable at building a porch or making a rockery; I may even be fairly skilled in the fixing of drain-pipes; but when anything has to be done that involves ladders, I always send for workmen. It isn't that I cannot climb—I have done plenty of mountaineering in my day—but ladder work is best left to those who are accustomed to it.

Now, however, there was no time for that. We should have had to send three miles for a gang of builders, and it was doubtful, even then, if anyone would have come so late in the evening.

But the trouble was that we hadn't a ladder long enough to reach the roof: we should have to take two shorter ladders and lash them together.

Luckily Jock is a handy man at work of that sort, and, of course, Peter had a great deal to say about how the job could best be done. We constructed a serviceable looking affair at last, although I must say that I was a trifle nervous about it. Then, with further advice from Peter, who appeared to have spent the greater part of his eleven years in watching builders at work, we managed to get the ladder raised against the house.

Much to Peter's disgust, I sent Jock up the ladder, while I held the foot of it in position and watched rather anxiously while he passed our amateur knots in the middle. From the top, Jock called down to me that he could see Mary standing quite happily looking down on him, with one arm round a chimney-pot. He tried to tempt her to come down, but, as I had expected, she would not move.

Between her and the end of our ladder was a steep slope of slates, and, however simple it may have been to Mary, it would have been madness

for Jock to attempt to climb it, although I believe he would have tried if I had not forbidden him to leave the ladder. A slip of the foot on those slates would have meant a fall to certain death on the stone-paved court below.

Nevertheless, we had to reach Mary somehow. We had one more ladder, a very short one, and I sent Peter to get this from the outhouse. When it arrived, I got Peter to climb the big ladder, dragging the tiny one behind him until he was high enough to hand it up to Jock. Then Jock lifted the little ladder over his head and laid it flat along the slates, lashing it with cord against the top of the bigger ladder.

To this day I am a little uncertain what would then have been the best policy. At the time, however, my decision was affected by the fact that I did not put a great deal of faith in our cord lashings. They were not done by experts, and, secure though they looked, I was not altogether sure of them. I had the idea that that combination

of three ladders might want a good deal of holding in position. It needed, I thought, one man at the foot, and another at the top to hold the short, sloping ladder in place with one hand and the whole thing to the gutter of the house with the other. Without that double support I pictured the weight of a man on the sloping ladder pushing the whole erection over. I may have been wrong : as I have said, I don't pretend to understand the habits of ladders nearly so well as I do those of elephants, caterpillars and ostriches. But that is what I felt at the time, and it is that that made me decide that Jock should hold the foot of our ladder, while I held the gutter at the top, and Peter went up to catch Mary.

Peter, of course, was charmed, to say the least of it, at the proposal. He was beginning to fear that his job was that of spectator.

At first the plan worked perfectly. Peter went up and climbed on to the shorter, sloping ladder, and although I watched the manœuvre rather

anxiously and directed him how to place his feet, the boy did the job very skilfully.

But Mary was still frightened, or else she was beginning to enjoy this new kind of game. She waited till Peter, lying on his face along the ladder, was able to reach out a hand to her, and then she backed. Letting go of the chimney-pot, she went behind it and retreated along the apex of the roof until, by the time Peter had reached the chimney-stack, she was close to the farther stack, some four yards away.

Naturally, I told Peter then to give up and come back ; but, just as my plans had been upset earlier because Mary was a chimpanzee, so they were defeated now by the fact that Peter was a boy. He knew nothing about prudence, or anything of the sort. He was enjoying himself immensely, and he was on his mettle. He hadn't any thought of turning back with the game hardly begun, and if he heard me call to him he, so to speak, turned his deaf ear to the sound.

He argued, I suppose, that if Mary could walk along the top of the roof, so could he ; although, when it came to the point, he found it easier to sit astride and work himself along with his hands.

Mary may still have been enjoying the game, just as she had enjoyed many with Peter during the past few days : or she may have been frightened. In either case, she had no intention of being caught, and as Peter came nearer, paddling himself along quite fast over the slates, she once more decided to retreat. One part of the roof, just beyond where she was standing, was a few feet lower than the rest : that is to say, immediately behind the second chimney-stack the wall of the house went straight down for about five feet, and then the sloping roofs, still with a sharp apex between them, continued. Mary therefore clambered across the chimneys, dropped gently down to the lower section of roof, and began to walk along it.

I don't altogether blame Peter for disregarding

my instructions to come back. Of course, he ought to have done so. But what boy worth his salt would have done? Not I, at his age, at any rate, although, of course, that did not prevent me from putting a great deal of sternness into my voice as I shouted to him! And, indeed, I became seriously alarmed as I saw him clambering round the chimney-stack and hanging by his hands to make the drop down to the lower roof.

It was in that drop that the accident occurred. Peter's left foot turned in slightly as he let go his grip of the chimney-pot, and as he reached the slates it was twisted under him. It is a wonder that he did not break his leg; but even as it was he sprained his ankle. It is a wonder, also, that with the sudden pain and the awkward position in which he arrived on the lower roof he did not lose his balance entirely and fall head first into the garden below.

But somehow he didn't. Great though the

pain was, he kept his head, and managed to hold the top of the roof and move until he was sitting astride it, with one leg hanging down, useless.

I had heard his cry as he fell.

" Are you all right, Peter ? " I called.

" Hurt my ankle," Peter answered, and that was all he said.

I knew, of course, that something pretty serious had happened. Peter was now out of sight. I went down the ladder as fast as I could, and with a good deal of difficulty Jock and I lowered the ladder to the ground, although we had to cut the cords that secured the short ladder before anything could be done. Then we carried the long ladder round to the back of the house and raised it against the farther wall. A minute later I was at the top of it.

I shall never forget the sight I then saw.

Peter was sitting astride the lower roof, and Mary, no longer regarding herself as pursued, but recognising, as by some instinct she always can,

that someone she loved was hurt, had come close to the boy and was holding him by the arm.

"Can you slide down to me, Peter?" I asked.

"I don't know," he answered. "My leg 's hurting awfully."

"Can you hang by your hands and then slide down the roof to me?" I suggested. "I 'll catch you."

It wasn't, I am afraid, a very clever suggestion, because having once sprained an ankle myself I knew that the slightest pressure on the foot means agony. If Peter had slid down the slates the damaged foot would have been jarred continually, and as likely as not it would have struck the ladder when I stopped him.

But something had to be done, and done quickly. I doubted if there was even time for Jock to fetch the shorter ladder and bring it to our assistance, although I told him at once to do so. Peter, poor fellow, was in considerable pain,

and pain of that sort often leads to giddiness and even faintness. If Peter fainted he would lose his grip of the roof and would inevitably slip down, not by careful direction into my arms, but helter-skelter, and, as likely as not, on the opposite side of the house, where there was no one to stop him, and he would fall to his death on the stone paving beneath.

Something, therefore, had to be done, and done quickly.

"I think you'd better try to slide down to me," I said. "I will catch you, old chap."

"I couldn't," said Peter. "It 's hurting awfully. I say do hurry up and do something. I feel awfully rotten."

Looking down, I could see Jock running with the shorter ladder on his shoulder, but there was no time to wait until we could have carried it up and fastened it into position.

"Hold this ladder, Jock," I cried, and then I began to clamber on to the roof.

I did not enjoy that moment. Walking on steeply-sloping slates, with a drop of fifty feet below them and stone paving at the bottom, is not an exercise that rejoices my heart. I had no time even to remove my shoes for the sake of getting a better foothold in my socks. Without losing another minute, I had to climb that roof as best I could and hold the half-fainting Peter until Jock could come and fix the short ladder.

With one foot still on the top rung, I set my right knee on the slates and fumbled for a hand grip. There was little to take hold of: in fact, there was nothing, and I knew that I should have to trust my fate entirely to Providence.

And then a sound attracted my attention, and I looked up.

The sound was one of Mary's grunts.

She had left her position on the apex of the roof, and was half-way down the slope. Her feet could find a grip where there was none for my leather-soled boots, and on the bare roof she

was half-dragging, half-carrying Peter towards me, while he paddled himself along with his hands.

A minute later Peter was in my arms.

* * * * *

I don't think that Mary was aware that she had done anything out of the ordinary. She had seen that Peter was hurt and could not move, and that I was trying to reach him. Therefore she had carried him to me. She was not conscious of having played the part of a hero.

But Peter and I thought differently.

She had rescued us, at a moment when we were both in a very awkward position. Peter told me afterwards that he was terrified when he saw me trying to walk on the slates, and he had tried to move down to me, and then Mary had come and helped him.

"She was wonderful," he said; and however

commonplace the incident may have seemed to Mary, I, at any rate, agreed with Peter.

* * * * *

Unfortunately, that was the last of Peter's adventures in my garden, for the sprained ankle kept him in bed until the holidays were over. But when I went to sit with him and tried to keep him amused with stories of the jungle, he always stopped me. "Tell me something about Mary," he would say.

Thank goodness, he no longer thought of her as "a creature to be tied up outside." I don't think he will ever forget Mary, and for that matter I doubt if Mary will ever forget Peter.

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